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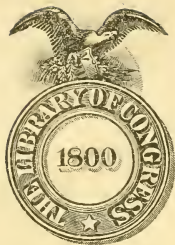
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Washington



Some of the secret troubles
of Washington when he was
Commander-in-chief.

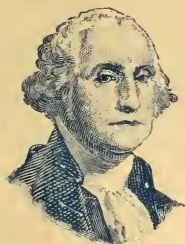
By Mrs. Thomas Clapp Pitkin.



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SOME
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WASHINGTON

WHEN

COMMANDER-
IN-CHIEF.

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SOME OF THE
SECRET TROUBLES OF WASHINGTON
WHEN
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.



READ BEFORE THE
MOUNT VERNON SOCIETY OF DETROIT,
DEC. 2, 1896.

BY
MRS. THOMAS CLAPP PITKIN,
AUTHOR OF
The Washington Spurious Letters.



PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.


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HE history of any war is not complete until the difficulties, hindrances and embarrassments of every kind that beset its leaders are made known, and this can never be while they are living. We read of a victory and it sounds well, but of a town evacuated, a retreat ordered, we are not always told the reason unless it was a purely strategical one; it might not be wise to say: "I could not carry out this plan because 3,000 of my men had no shoes," or "that enterprise was given up because there was no food of any kind for the troops, nor money to buy any."

The fame of many a great General owes much to the zeal and energy of his Commissary and Quartermaster.

Bonaparte had no hesitation in saying, in his strong way, "An army crawls upon its belly," and Wellington affirmed the same in more elegant language. The needs of those great commanders, with vast resources behind them, were just the same, in fact, as our first General met, only he had difficulties they never imagined, and so critical was the time, so stupendous the results that hung on all his movements, that for years his weakness must be concealed, sometimes, as he says, *even from his own officers*.

The secret journals of Congress, not published until 1818, made known to the world many things that only a

small circle knew before, and read now, fill us with wonder at the condition of affairs which he had to meet and manage as best he could.

I thought it might be interesting, in this day of immense wealth, of steam transportation, of lightning telegraphs, to renew our acquaintance with some of the evils borne by our first great Leader, and which he himself said, not only prolonged our war most unnecessarily, but added enormously to its expense—and which brought on him trials he could only safely confide to the body that commissioned him.

“The Provincial Congress that met in 1775,” says Judge Marshall—but here allow me to stop a moment and say, the word Congress is to some misleading, supposing the body referred to was the same in constitution as the one that now assembles in Washington every year. The Provincial Congress was, in fact, only a committee of leading citizens, sent from thirteen independent, sovereign States, to confer together on the startling situation in which they found themselves as opposed to the great and powerful kingdom of Great Britain, and to devise ways and means out of it. They, in fact, had no power to carry out a single one of their own resolutions and the separate States were bitterly jealous of any infringement on their own rights and liberties. “This Provincial Congress,” as Judge Marshall says, “that met in 1775, had adjourned the same year with strong hopes that the difficulties between the colonies and the mother country would be adjusted to mutual satisfaction;” but when the temper of the King and Parliament dissipated these hopes and the immense hostile preparations of Great Britain convinced them of their mistake, they

realized they had wasted valuable time. Unaccustomed to war on a great scale, as heretofore each province had taken care of its own little wars, they had an idea that an army could be created each campaign for the purposes of that campaign and that such temporary means were all that was necessary. Under these false ideas, the project of enlisting a permanent army, or rather "for the war," was too long neglected, and in the meanwhile the fire of patriotism which had inspired the first rush to arms had somewhat dimmed as the trials and privations of a soldier's life became better known.

George Washington, who, in the Legislature of Virginia, had taken an early and decided stand against the tyrannical aggressions of Great Britain, received his commission as Commander-in-Chief from Congress June 19, 1775, with less enthusiasm than we should expect, but with a determination (as he wrote to his brother Augustine) "to devote himself and his best endeavors, but fearing his own want of experience to conduct a business so extensive in its nature and so arduous in its execution."

With the promptness of a conscientious man, he first made his will, which he sent to his wife, "his dear Patsey," hoping its provisions would please her, and begging his brother and sister-in-law to visit Mt. Vernon as often as possible to comfort her, he left Philadelphia for headquarters at Cambridge, where the Provincial Army was gathered to oppose the British, whose forces, partly on the main land and partly in Boston, were supported by numerous ships of war in the bay.

He arrived July 3d. What did he find there? From the reports of officers, he expected to find 18,000 or 20,000

men, but there were only 14,500 fit for duty. These came from different States, without order or discipline, and owing allegiance only to their own State, could not form an effective army without complete reorganization, which he immediately set himself to effect; but this work required time and, unfortunately, the terms of most of these troops would expire in November and December, so that a council of war, called July 9th, decided that more men must be immediately forwarded to the seat of war to be properly drilled to take the place of the disbanded regiments.

This was the first want; next the General tells Congress, there are neither tents, nor clothes, nor arms, nor ammunition, no Commissary, no Quartermaster, no commission of artillery, no military chest, which is an elegant way of saying no money to buy anything; further, the engineers on the ground knew nothing of military needs and he begs Congress, if there are any engineers anywhere in the country who know anything that can help him, to send them on at once; the last, and certainly not the least of these needs, was one whose importance we can fully understand, there was *no powder*. In the first reports it was told him there were 303 barrels, but a few days after revealed the astounding fact that there had been a blunder, and that, in fact, there were only nine rounds to each man.

Instantly secret application was made in every quarter where powder might possibly be obtained, but not until a fortnight passed was even a very small quantity received from Elizabeth, New Jersey, and if the citizens of that place had known that their means of defense was being sent to Cambridge, they would have risen "en masse" to

prevent it, but night and darkness kept the secret from them. No powder had ever been made in this country; indeed, everything like munitions of war, guns, artillery, uniforms, blankets, even, had been sent from England—that government had not only discouraged all efforts made by patriotic men to supply their own needs in manufactured articles, but by official orders had closed twenty-five years earlier factories and foundries that were in successful operation.*

In this campaign, as late as August 4th, we find the Commander-in-Chief writing thus to Gov. Cooke, of Rhode Island:

“I am now, sir, in strict confidence, to acquaint you that our necessities in the articles of powder and lead are so great as to require an immediate supply. I must earnestly entreat that you will fall upon some measure to forward every pound of each in your colony that can possibly be spared. It is not within the propriety or safety of such a correspondence to say what I might on this subject.”

Of course it must be kept a secret, a secret that could not be confided to the 14,000 men most affected by it, and if any rumor of the fact reached the British general's ears, intrenched in the good town of Boston, he no doubt

* It gives me pleasure to say here that men of my husband's name and family, taking one of these foundries that had been idle for a quarter of a century, turned it into a powder mill and, to the extent of their ability, supplied the patriotic army with this necessary implement of war, until the end of the contest: for this they received no remuneration, the only help the government gave being the power to seize salt petre wherever it could be found.

thought it was meant to deceive him, as it was past all belief, that an army without bayonets would dare to defy him without powder also. No wonder that Washington was obliged to confine his operations to simply holding the enemy in check, cutting off all their supplies, or that he wrote to Richard Henry Lee, August 10th: "Between you and me, I think we are in an exceedingly dangerous situation."

September 21 he informs Congress: "It gives me great pain to be obliged to solicit the attention of the honorable Congress to the state of the army, which might imply the slightest apprehension of being neglected. But my situation is inexpressibly distressing—to see winter fast approaching upon a naked army, the term of their service within a few weeks of expiring, and no provision yet made for such important events. Added to this, the military chest is totally exhausted; the paymaster has not a single dollar in hand; the Commissary General assures me he has strained his credit for the subsistence of the army to the utmost; the Quartermaster General is precisely in the same situation and the greater part of the troops are in a condition *not far from mutiny.*"

That this most insubordinate temper existed in other of the military departments is evident from a letter of Major General Schuyler to Washington. Schuyler had been without powder—but all that Washington could reply to his application was an assurance that "on that point their distress was mutual."

Afterwards, writing from Ticonderoga from a sick-bed, Schuyler says: "The anxiety I have felt since my arrival here lest the army should starve, occasioned by a scandal-

ous want of subordination and inattention to my orders in some of the officers, the vast variety of vexations and disagreeable incidents that almost every hour arise in some department or other, not only retard my cure but have put me considerably back for some time past. If Job had been a general in my situation, his memory had not been so famous for patience, but," he adds, "the glorious end we have in view and which I have a confident hope will be attained, will atone for all."

General Montgomery, who was investing the British fort at St. Johns, wrote the same October to the General: "When I mentioned my intentions, I did not consider that I was at the head of troops who carry the spirit of freedom into the field and think for themselves. I cannot help observing to how little purpose I am here. Were I not afraid the example would be too generally followed and that the public service might suffer, I would not stay an hour at the head of troops whose operations I cannot direct. I must say, I have no hope of success unless from the garrison;" the garrison of the fort he was besieging—"needing provisions."

Later in the same season, both officers, finding themselves so hampered by the confusion and want of discipline of their unruly troops, who would acknowledge no authority beyond the State they came from, and greatly criticised for their inefficiency, had signified to Congress their intention to resign, but Washington wrote a most earnest appeal to Schuyler, telling him that he had the same troubles, but was bearing them as best he could and begging them to do the same and not desert their country in the hour of her utmost need. This appeal to both was

successful. Montgomery left the memory of a patriot when he fell, gallantly fighting for his country at Quebec—while Schuyler's career is known to you all.

To return to Washington before Boston, December 5th, he writes to Gov. Cook that it will be impossible to recruit the army by voluntary enlistments, the fact is so, he will not attempt to point out the causes; the Connecticut troops are about to desert the noble cause they are engaged in, and when their time is up, he fears the Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Massachusetts men will do the same. In the same month, December, 1775, he writes to his one confidential friend, Joseph Read: "Our enlistment goes on slowly; only 5,917 are engaged for the ensuing campaign, and yet we are told we shall get the number wanted, as they are only playing off to see what advantages are to be made, and whether a bounty cannot be extorted from the public at large or from individuals in case of a draft."

January 4th, 1776, Washington again wrote to Read: "It is easier to imagine than to describe the situation of my mind for some time past and my feelings under our present circumstances. Search the volumes of history through, and I much question whether a case similar to ours is to be found, namely, to maintain a post against the power of the British Army for six months together, *without powder*, and then to have one army disbanded and another to be raised within the same distance of a re-inforced enemy. It is too much to attempt. I wish this month were well over our heads. The same desire of retiring into a chimney corner seized the troops of Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts as soon as their time

expired, as had wrought upon those of Connecticut, notwithstanding many of them made an offer to me to remain till the lines could be sufficiently strengthened. We are now left with a good deal less than half-raised regiments and about 5,000 militia, who only stand engaged to the middle of this month, when, according to custom, they will depart, be the necessity never so urgent."

In another letter to Read, the General pours out his soul thus: "Such a dearth of public spirit and such want of virtue, such stock-jobbing and fertility in all low arts to obtain advantages of one kind or another in this great change of military arrangements, I never saw before, and pray God's mercy I may never be witness to again. After the last of the month the minute men and militia must be called on for the defence of the lines, and these being under no kind of control themselves, will destroy the little subordination I have been laboring to establish, and run me into one evil while I am endeavoring to avoid another. "Could I have foreseen," exclaimed the overtaxed Commander, "could I have foreseen what I have experienced and am likely to experience, no consideration upon earth should have induced me to accept this command. A regiment or any subordinate department would have been accompanied with ten times the satisfaction and perhaps the honor." Seeing no way out of these difficulties, he ejaculates, "God in his great mercy will direct."

The minute men here referred to were bodies of men organized to serve under their own officers—who brought their own arms and provisions, who came when called on, but left at the end of three days—no doubt very useful in any sudden emergency.

In another letter to the same friend Washington writes: "We are now without any money in our treasury, *powder* in our magazines, or arms in our stores. We are without a brigadier—the want of which has been twenty times urged on Congress—engineers, or expresses, and by and by, when called to take the field, shall not have a tent to lie in. These are evils but small in comparison with those which disturb my present repose. Our *enlistments* are at a stand; the fears I ever entertained are realized, viz.: The discontented officers have thrown such difficulties or stumbling blocks in the way of recruiting that I no longer entertain a hope of completing the army by voluntary enlistments," etc. "Thus am I situated with respect to men;" and he goes on to tell how in the matter of arms he is worse off. "How to get furnished I know not. I have applied to this and the neighboring colonies, but with what success time only can tell. The reflections on my situation produce many an unhappy hour, when all around me are wrapped in sleep. *Few people know* the predicament we are in; fewer still will believe, if any disaster happens to these lines, from what cause it flows. I have often thought how much happier I should have been if, instead of accepting the command under such circumstances, I had taken my musket on my shoulder and entered the ranks, or if I could have justified it to my conscience, had retired to the back country and lived in a wigwam. Could I have known that such a backwardness would have been discovered among the old soldiers" (meaning those at headquarters when he took command), "all the generals upon earth should not have convinced me of the propriety of delaying an attack on Boston till this time."

The Commander-in-Chief here refers to the fact that soon after his arrival at Cambridge he called a Council of War to consider the expediency of attacking Boston, but the officers negatived it, as they did a second proposal of the same kind later. For himself, he would have risked much to give an impetus to public spirit; he deeply felt the criticisms on his own inactivity; we all know what a wise critic the public is of military affairs, and that public was just as wise in such matters as our own.

February 18th, 1776, the Commander-in-Chief writes to the President of Congress that the ice being now sufficiently strong to bear troops, he called a council of war, and proposed for the third time to assault Boston, but the general officers would not support him. "True it is," he writes, "and I cannot help acknowledging it, that I have many disagreeable sensations on account of my situation, for to have the eyes of the whole continent fixed with anxious expectation of hearing of some great event, and to be restrained in every military operation for want of the necessary means to carry it on, is not very pleasing, especially as the means used to *conceal my weakness* from the enemy conceal it also from my friends, and add to their wonder."

Finally—the patriots having thrown up works that commanded the city—Howe, obliged to choose between fighting or evacuating, chose the latter, and in March sailed with his troops, as it was supposed, for New York, followed as soon as possible by his adversary. This, as you all know, was a very important point, strategically, and also on account of the strong Tory element in the province.

In a letter to Congress from Headquarters near New

York, September 24, 1776, the General thus expresses himself: "We are now on the eve of another"—what? You would naturally expect him to say battle or engagement, oh! no!—"another dissolution of our army! The remembrance of the difficulties which happened on the occasion last year, and the consequences which might have followed the change, if proper advantages had been taken by the enemy, added to a knowledge of the present temper and disposition of the troops, afford but a very gloomy prospect in the appearances of things now, and satisfy me, beyond the possibility of doubt, that unless some very speedy and effectual measures are adopted in Congress, our cause will be lost."

He goes on to tell of his many various and distracting trials. "The present appearance of things is so little pleasing to myself as to render it a matter of no surprise to me if I should stand capitally censured by Congress, added to a consciousness of my inability to govern an army composed of such discordant parts and under a variety of intricate and perplexing circumstances, induce a belief not only, but a thorough conviction, in my mind that it will be impossible for me to conduct matters in such a manner as to give satisfaction to the public, which is all the recompense I aim at or wish for."

In a further communication of October 4, 1776, dealing with many needs of the Army, he says: "The interval of time between the old and new armies must be filled up with militia from the separate States, "if to be had," with whom he knew his authority was entirely valueless; and he further tells Congress that "unless the most vigorous and decisive exertions are immediately adopted, the certain and

absolute loss of our liberties will be the inevitable consequence."

November 6, the General writes to the Assembly of Massachusetts of the very critical state of things at Headquarters; of the dissolution of one army and very little prospect of getting a new one in any reasonable time, and this in face of a powerful enemy; so he begs for State militia from Massachusetts to serve at least till March 1st, unless their services could be earlier dispensed with.

The temper of the New York militia at this time may be judged of by the following extract from a letter of Gen. Greene's to Washington: "I am informed by Col. Hawkes Hay that the militia whom he commands refuse to do duty. They say Gen. Howe has promised them peace, liberty and safety; and that is all they want. What is to be done?"

To his brother, under date of November 19, 1776, the poor General writes how he had constantly and urgently put before Congress the absolute necessity of long enlistments and the extra expense of short enlistments; the backwardness of the States in filling the quotas called for by Congress; the different States quarreling among themselves about the appointments of their officers, and nominating such *as are not fit to be shoeblacks*, from favoritism of this or that member of Assembly."

At the end of November, Congress is again informed of the truly alarming state of things: "The last levies just going home, some who were engaged till January 1st, now leaving—a month before their time—and this with the enemy near."

December 20, 1776, Washington writes to the President of Congress in the same strain. He is impatient to know

whether Congress will allow the corps of artillery to be augmented and establish a corps of engineers. "No man ever had a greater choice of difficulties than he," and these have all come from short enlistments and a mistaken dependence on State militia. "Militia will do for a little while, but in a little while, if often called upon, they will not come at all. The militia might have saved New Jersey, but they did not, and consequently the civilians there were fraternizing with the British. Can anything, he says, "be more destructive to the general recruiting service than giving \$10 bounty for six weeks' service of the militia, who come in, you cannot tell how; go, you cannot tell where; consume your provisions, exhaust your stores, and leave you at a critical moment. These, sir, are the men I am to depend upon ten days hence: this is the basis on which your cause will and must forever depend till you get a large standing army."

This "standing army" was bitterly opposed in Congress, but finally, experience having shewn its necessity, consent was reluctantly given for 88 battalions to be recruited.

Washington tells Congress they must have 100; his officers say 110. In return they might say it would be difficult enough to get the first number; but in his opinion the officers of 110 would be able to recruit many more men than the 88. Then he proceeds to tell them what this army must have: clothes, tents, ammunition, things that in this day are implied in the very name of army and absolutely essential to its efficiency.

The winter of 1777 and 1778 was a very depressing one. The Commander-in-Chief had begun it with a force diminished to 4,000 half-disciplined men, and an empty army-

chest. He had had to contend not merely with an enemy, but with the parsimony and meddlesome interference of Congress. Instead of that body using all its influence to urge the separate States, and especially those least affected by the war, to send men and means, it had left the army without funds and without reinforcements. It had made promotions contrary to his advice, and contrary to military usage—thereby wronging and disgusting some of his bravest officers and changed the commissariat in the midst of a campaign, throwing the whole service into confusion. He applied to the Governors of Virginia and Pennsylvania for assistance until the new army authorized by Congress, and as yet only on paper, could be gathered and drilled. He depicted his condition in the most forcible manner, and urged them to send him reinforcements even if compelled to resort to a draft. "A long and continual sacrifice of the individual for the public good," he wrote, "ought not to be expected or required. The nature of men must be changed before institutions built on the presumptive proof of such a principle can succeed. This condition is supported by the conduct of the American Army as well as by that of all other men. At the commencement of the dispute, in the first effusion of zeal, when it was believed that service would be temporary, they entered into it without regard to pecuniary considerations, but finding its duration much longer than they had expected, and that instead of deriving advantage from the hardships and dangers to which they had been exposed, they were losers by their patriotism, and fell far short of even a competency for their wants, they have gradually abated in their ardor, and, with many, an entire disinclination to the service under present

circumstances has taken place. To this must be ascribed the frequent resignations and frequent importunities for permission to resign from officers of the highest merit." He goes on to say, "You can only have a hold on a man when he values his commission and fears to lose it." The evils caused by the short enlistments and the jealousies of the separate States are thus commented on in a letter to Washington at this time from Robert Morris, a letter full of despondency at the condition of affairs. "It is useless at this period to examine into the causes of our present unhappy situation unless that examination would be productive of a cure for those evils; in fact, those causes have long been known to such as would open their eyes. It has been my fate to make an ineffectual opposition (in Congress) to all short enlistments, to colonial appointment of officers, and many other measures which I thought pregnant with mischief, but these things either suited the genius and habits or squared with the interests of some States that had sufficient interest to prevail, and nothing is now left but to extricate ourselves as well as we can."

As time passed Washington must have viewed with the greatest anxiety not only the military, but the political situation. In a letter to his brother, in the spring of 1778, he regrets that the ablest men are kept at home in the service of the Independent States, while inferior men are sent to the General Congress; and yet on these depend the great national interests. "Those who are at a distance from the seat of war are living in such perfect tranquility that they conceive the war to be in a manner at an end, while those near it are so disaffected that they only serve as embarrassments."

It seemed to devolve on Washington to arouse the patriotism as well as to lead the armies of his country. In the winter of 1777-78, through Col. Harrison of Virginia, he made a most earnest appeal to the men of his native State. "Our affairs are in a more distressed, ruinous and deplorable condition than they have been since the commencement of the war. By a faithful laborer then in the cause; by a man who is daily injuring his private estate without the smallest earthly advantage, not common to all in case of a favorable issue of the dispute; by one who wishes the prosperity of America most devoutly, but sees it, or thinks he sees it, on the brink of ruin; you are besought most earnestly, my dear Colonel Harrison, to exert yourself in endeavoring to rescue your country, by sending your best and ablest men to Congress. If I were to be called upon to draw a picture of the times and of men, from what I have seen, heard and in part know, I should in one word say that idleness, dissipation, and extravagance seem to have laid fast hold of most of them; that speculation, peculation, and an insatiable thirst for riches, seem to have got the better of every other consideration, and almost of every order of men; that party disputes and personal quarrels are the great business of the day; while the momentous concerns of an empire, a great and accumulating debt, ruined finances, depreciated money and want of credit, which in its consequences is the want of everything, are but secondary considerations, and postponed from day to day, from week to week, as if our affairs wore the most promising aspect."

As a remedy for this culpable indifference, he suggests that each colony should not only choose, but absolutely

compel their ablest men to attend Congress, and should instruct them to go into a thorough investigation of the causes that have produced such effects for the purpose of remedying them. "Of what use is it," he enquires, "for the States to be wholly engrossed in their individual affairs, framing constitutions and making laws? If the great whole is mismanaged, they will sink with the general wreck—being lost by their own folly and negligence, or by the desire of living at ease and tranquility during so great a revolution, which demanded the ablest efforts of their ablest and most honest men."

At this very time, and while the army was suffering the extremes of cold and hunger, in Philadelphia, not very distant from it, "An assembly, a concert, a dinner, a supper, that will cost 300 or 400 pounds, will not only take men off from acting in this business, but even from thinking of it; while a great part of the officers of our army, from absolute necessity, are quitting the service, and the more virtuous few, rather than do this, are sinking by sure degrees into beggary and want."

To add to other trials, in this year appeared the forged letters which were circulated freely through the country, and represented the General as secretly attached to the British cause. He took no public notice of them whatever, but to his friends denounced their villainy, it being evident they were written by some one who had been familiar in his household. He probably never would have noticed them publicly if in his last presidential term, in the midst of the bitterest calumny, these letters had not re-appeared on the stage of public affairs. Till this time his enemies had been able to say, "Of course he wrote them; he has never denied

it." And for this reason we may judge he made such a very formal and public denial just as he left public life forever.

Another difficulty which Washington had to meet, and which required infinite tact, address and secrecy to adjust, was, in addition to the conflicting claims of the officers from the various independent States, those of foreigners, who, as our war continued, offered their experience and their services to the cause of freedom. From Poland, from France, from Germany, came enthusiastic men, holding high commissions at home, and not willing to be put under inferior officers here. This was a difficult matter to arrange; their services must not be refused, and yet to place in command of our troops men ignorant of their peculiar character, habits and customs, and especially of their language, seemed unwise. He did, however, overcome these difficulties successfully. Kosciusko, De Kalb, Steuben, Pulaski, and many others of lesser fame, became valuable aids in our cause, and as for Lafayette, you know how his name is inseparably linked with that of Washington.

The Continental Congress had limited themselves to the expenditure of twenty millions. When this and much more had been used; when, in fact, it had become bankrupt, and its paper worthless, Washington's difficulties were greatly increased.

Many officers had entered the army with a little means, which soon melted away, leaving them destitute and in rags. At one time a year's pay would hardly buy a pair of shoes; many commissions were thrown up, and the General's heart bled at losing some of his very best officers.

But I can only glance, in the time allotted me, at a few of the secret troubles of our great General. Perhaps the

one that affected him most is known in history as "Conway's Cabal."

A Frenchman of Irish descent named Conway, a veteran of European wars, received a commission from Congress as Brigadier. Boastful, ambitious, intriguing and bent only on pushing his personal fortunes, he contrived to influence not only Generals Gates, Mifflin and others of less rank, but also members of Congress, including its committee called the Board of War. This intrigue was in opposition to Washington, whom it was hoped to force to a resignation and have Gates appointed in his place. The Commander-in-Chief had seen enough of Conway to understand his character and his aims, and hearing he was to be promoted, wrote a strong letter of remonstrance to a member of Congress, which, however, did not prevent Conway being made Inspector General. This conspiracy was carried on by insidious and depreciating public conversation and by anonymous letters of the same character. The following anonymous letter received by Patrick Henry, Governor of Virginia, was sent by him to General Washington:

"Yorktown, January 12, 1778.

"Dear Sir—The common danger of our country first brought you and me together. I recollect with pleasure the influence of your conversation and eloquence upon the opinions of this country, in the beginning of the present controversy. *You* first taught us to shake off our idolatrous attachment to royalty, and to oppose its encroachments upon our liberties with our very lives. By these means you saved us from ruin. The independence of America is the offspring of that liberal spirit of thinking and acting which

followed the destruction of the sceptres of kings and the mighty power of Great Britain. But, sir, we have only passed the Red Sea; a dreary wilderness is still before us, and unless a Moses or a Joshua are raised up in our behalf, we must perish before we reach the promised land. We have nothing to fear from our enemies on the way. Gen. Howe, it is true, has taken Philadelphia, but he has only changed his prison. His dominions are bounded on all sides by his out-sentries. America can only be undone by herself. She looks up to her councils and arms for protection; but, alas! what are they? Her representation in Congress dwindled to only twenty-one members. Her Adams, her Wilson, her Henry are no more among them. Her councils weak—and partial remedies applied constantly for universal diseases. Her army, what is it? A Major-General belonging to it called it a few days ago, in my hearing, a mob. Discipline—wholly neglected; the Commissary's and Quarter-Master's departments, filled with idleness, ignorance and peculation; our hospitals crowded with 6,000 sick, but half provided with necessities or accommodations, and more dying in them in one month than perished in the field during the whole of the last season. The money depreciating without effectual means being taken to raise it; the country distracted with Quixotic attempts to regulate the price of provisions; an artificial famine created by it and a real one dreaded from it. The spirit of our people failing through a more intimate acquaintance with the causes of our misfortunes; many submitting daily to Gen. Howe, and more wishing to do it only to avoid the calamities that threaten our country. But *is our cause desperate?* By no means. We have wisdom,

virtue and strength enough to save us if they could be called into action. The northern army has shown what Americans are capable of doing with a *General* at their head. A Gates, a Lee, or a Conway would in a few weeks render them an irresistible body of men. The last of the above officers has accepted of the new office of Inspector-General of our Army, in order to reform abuses—but the remedy is only a palliative one. In one of his letters to a friend he says, ‘A great and good God hath decreed America to be free—or a weak General and bad counselors would have ruined her long ago.’ You may rest assured of each of the facts related in this letter. The author of it is one of your Philadelphia friends. A hint of his name if found out by the handwriting must not be mentioned to your intimate friend. Even the letter must be thrown into the fire, but some of its contents ought to be made public in order to awaken, enlighten and alarm our country. I rely upon your prudence and am, dear sir, with my usual attachment to you and to our beloved independence,

“Yours sincerely, _____.”

There is no doubt anonymous letters ought usually to be thrown into the fire, but this one went straight to Washington with a most reverential epistle from Patrick Henry, to whom it had been addressed. After saying that the anonymous correspondent may be too insignificant to be noticed, and yet fearing there may be some scheme or party forming against the General, he continues: “To give you the trouble of this gives me pain. It would suit my inclination better to give you some assistance in the great business of the war. But I will not conceal anything from

you by which you may be affected, for I really think your personal welfare and the happiness of America are intimately connected."

Another anonymous letter was received by the patriotic President of Congress, Henry Laurens, with a request to lay it before that body. This letter is too long to quote here. After dwelling minutely upon all the losses and disasters of the campaign, and showing how in the opinion of the writer they ought not to have occurred, it ended thus: "The people of America have been guilty of idolatry in making a man their God, and the God of Heaven and earth will convince them by woeful experience that he is only a man; that no good may be expected from the standing army until Baal and his worshipers are banished from the camp." This epistle also, instead of being laid before Congress as requested by the writer, was sent at once to Washington.

At this time also came a warning from the General's old and faithful friend, Dr. Craik, informing him that secret enemies were trying to ruin him in the estimation of the country, claiming that he had had abundant force to crush the enemy; that he had really given up Philadelphia; that he could have defeated the enemy many times, and holding up Gates' success in contrast. Dr. Craik further told him that his enemies dared not appear openly, but were powerful in Congress, even in the Board of War itself, and hoped to force him to resign.

Washington's conduct in this emergency is really a model to humanity and shows to what heights a noble motive and a clear conscience can elevate human nature. In his reply to Laurens, President of Congress, who had sent him one

of the anonymous letters, he writes: "I was not unapprized that a malignant faction had been for some time forming to my prejudice, which could not but give me pain on a personal account, but my chief concern arises from the apprehension of the dangerous consequences which intestine dissensions may produce to the common cause. I would not desire in the least degree to suppress a free spirit of inquiry into any part of my conduct that even faction itself may deem reprehensible. The anonymous paper handed to you exhibits many serious charges, and it is my wish that it should be submitted to Congress. My enemies take an unfair advantage of me. They know the delicacy of my situation, and that motives of policy deprive me of the defense I might otherwise make against their insidious attacks. They know I cannot combat their insinuations, however injurious, without disclosing *secrets* which it is of the utmost moment to *conceal*."

What these were the Commander-in-Chief does not relate. They may have been already known to Laurens—it may have been again deficiency of powder, or men, or arms, or clothes, or food, or all these together—it was something that could not be made public without encouraging the enemy.

The movers in this conspiracy were startled to find the General knew of its existence, but he took no public notice, not even when Conway was confirmed as Inspector-General; he left the matter to work itself out. Washington Irving says that the Cabal might have accomplished the downfall of the Commander-in-Chief if he had been more irascible in his temper, more impulsive, and less firmly fixed in the affections of the people. The after history of the chief

conspirator is an interesting comment on this affair. While he held the office of Inspector-General, his reports to Congress were often disrespectful and fault-finding, and finally that body not carrying out one of his suggestions, in a fit of temper he sent in his resignation, which to his surprise was immediately accepted. Being in the habit of making offensive speeches about the army, he was challenged by General Cadwallader for one made in his presence. They fought and Conway fell, it was supposed, mortally wounded. In this condition he sent the following note to Washington:

“Philadelphia, July 23, 1778.

“Sir—I find myself just able to hold my pen during a few moments, and I take this opportunity to express my sincere grief for having written, said, or done anything disagreeable to your Excellency. My career will soon be over; therefore justice and truth prompt me to declare my last sentiments. You are in my eyes the great and good man. May you long enjoy the love, veneration and esteem of these States, whose liberties you have asserted by your virtues. I am with the greatest respect, Thomas Conway.”

This clique hostile to Washington contented themselves afterwards in secretly encouraging disaffection, contravening his wishes and obstructing his plans, hoping his popularity would thus be gradually undermined till they could adopt bolder measures. It was perhaps to this affair that the following story, related by Washington Irving as told him by Judge Jay, referred:

“Shortly before the death of John Adams, I was sitting alone with my father” (the John Jay of the treaty), “conversing about the American Revolution. Suddenly he

remarked, 'Oh! William! the history of that revolution will never be known; nobody now alive knows it but John Adams and myself.' Surprised at such a declaration, I asked him to what he referred. He briefly replied, 'The proceedings of the old Congress.' Again I inquired, 'What proceedings?' To this he answered, 'Those against Washington; from first to last there was a most bitter party against him.' As the old Congress sat with closed doors the public knew no more than it chose to reveal."

Let us be thankful for our ignorance here, and that we do not know the men who opposed and hated the man who gained our liberties for us; they are forgotten; while his memory, as Conway wished, is loved and venerated not only in this country, but by the whole civilized world.

Washington's character was so lofty in ideal, and in fact, that no malice, no scandal, could really affect him; it was this thorough honesty of heart and purpose, this absolute consecration to duty, however hard, that so greatly impressed all who came in personal contact with him; this unreserved devotion of himself stood in the place of that enthusiasm that attracts and controls men—often for evil as well as good. To the soldiers of the Continental Army, his influence, example and sympathy became all powerful, and transformed them into a band of heroes, bearing hunger, nakedness and suffering of every kind without a murmur, cheerfully offering their lives on their country's altar. Their sufferings might have been averted or greatly lessened if the thirteen independent States had quickly and patriotically met the requisitions of Congress; or even, as we look back, if the great cities had come forward to the extent of their ability. There was money enough and food

enough in the country for the needs of the army, but the extreme jealousy of each other, of the separate States, and fear of a standing army—producing want of co-operation, added to the difficulties of transportation, often made the burden fall very unequally. To these conditions Washington alludes in a farewell circular addressed to the Governors of the thirteen colonies, when he took leave of the army at the end of the war:

“The war might have been earlier brought to the same happy conclusion if the resources of the country could have been properly drawn forth; the discouragements occasioned by the complicated difficulties and embarrassments in which our affairs were by this means involved, would have long ago produced the dissolution of an army less patient, less virtuous, and less persevering than that I have had the honor to command.”

Conway recovered from his wounds, but finding his position in this country intolerable, returned to France.







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